WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Founded December 19, 1857 SEPTEMBER 1975

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

On behalf of the Society, I would like to salute and thank the Milton Pools for providing storage facilities for many years for our priceless artifacts and historical objects. They have been most patient and considerate while we have been arranging other storage facilities.

Thanks, too, to the University of Michigan for providing our storage facilities in the Willow Run Complex.

Also due special mention is Lydia Muncy for conceiving the idea for the Katherine Groomes Memorial Sale and propagating over 300 plants for the sale. It was so successful that your board of directors plans to repeat the sale each September. We hope that those in the society who bought some of the plants will be so kind as to provide slips and/or plants for future sales. More details later.

At this time, I would like to issue a call for volunteers who would like to work on special projects of the Society. This summer I have appointed Rosemary Whelan to be Membership Chairman, Stuart Thayer to be Curator, Irene Lawless to be in charge of refreshments for our meetings, Mary Steffek as telephone committee chairman, Thomas C. Lacy publicity chairman, and Hazel Proctor as General Museum Chairman. All of these people can use helping hands. If you are interested in helping out, call me at 663-5098.

We have a big, busy year coming up and some very interesting monthly meetings planned. Hope to see you there.

Thomas F. Lacy

UNIVERSITY DONATES SPACE AT WILLOW RUN AIRPORT; WCHS ARTIFACTS MOVED, NOW BEING CATALOGUED

It was hot and hectic but nevertheless a great day for the Society last summer when our collection of artifacts began to be moved to more secure quarters at Willow Run Airport.

What's more, the historic treasures which fill the six rooms to overflowing are now being professionally catalogued.

The University of Michigan made the space available free of charge and even furnished a truck a and driver to help.

When the good news was announced by retiring President Hazel Proctor she called it "a tremendous breakthrough for the Society and the Milton Pool family." The things had been stored "temporarily" in the Pool's barn for what turned out to be several years.

The new quarters are on the second floor of a cement block building in the airport complex. They are clean and dry and, while the temperature is low, it is kept above freezing. The building is behind a padlocked gate and the area is patrolled, she said.

The move took two days. Mrs. Proctor and Tom Lacy, Sr., made arrangements and supervised. A hard-working crew of young people did the lifting and loading. Working one or both days were Mary Steffek, Joan Pollock, John, Donald and Chris Proctor, Wystan Stevens, Tom Lacy, Jr., and Tony, the truck driver. (Unfortunately, no one wrote down his name, but he was very helpful.) Mrs. Pool served cool drinks to the crew at the barn.

Linda Eberbach headed the receiving committee at Willow Run. Assisting her one or both days were Bill and Polly Bender, Irene Lawless, Naomi James and Ethelyn Morton.

With an appropriation from the Board of Directors, Stuart Thayer, recently appointed curator, has hired a cataloguer and they are setting up a card file. Two rooms of larger items had been numbered at press time.

When completed the file will include a registration card for each item, plus one by number, one by classification and a donor card, if known.

Meanwhile, Stuart says he will need help from the membership, first in identifying and tagging, later in cleaning, repairing and perhaps refinishing. He plans to bring some small items to the next meetinf for help in identification.

NINETEENTH CENTURY TOOL COLLECTION GIVEN TO WCHS

A nice collection of nineteenth-century hand tools has been given to the Washtenaw County Historical Society, Curator Stuart Thayer reports.

They were given by Dr. June F. Wilson of 9250 Fleming Rd., Dexter. The collection, which belonged to her husband, contains an estimated 400-500 pieces. Among the items are saws including hay saws, a post-hole digger, planes, brace and bit, hand wrought chains and a set of brass veterinary tools for use on cattle.

1975 TOUR VISITS FIVE CENTENNIAL FARMS

A beautiful day in June, a country-style chicken dinner, a huge jug of lemonade along the way. Those were finishing touches on the 1975 WCHS tour of centennial farms.

Centennial farms are so designated upon application to the Michigan Historical Commission when the land has been in the same family for 100 years or more. Such farms usually display a sign donated by the Detroit Edison Co. marking it as a centennial farm.

The tour turnout was larger than ever. A caravan of three chartered city buses, a U-M van and several private autos made the tour. City bus drivers negotiated the unaccustomed route on narrow country roads carefully, especially turning around in close quarters at the Ellis farm without hitting the mailbox. One bus had to be partly unloaded, however, before it could clear the hump in the church driveway for the homeward trip.

Stops were made at five farms north of Ann Arbor. Tour-goers saw large old farm homes, family antiques, and heard something about the history of the farm from the hosts.

The tour included the Braun Farm, 4175 Whitmore Lake Rd.; Ellis Farm, 6101 Brookville Rd.; Wessel Farm, 6500 Dixboro Rd.; O'Connor Farm, 2720 Five Mile Rd.; and the Leland Farm, 7285 Whitmore Lake Rd. Dinner was served at the Wesley United Methodist Church at Whitmore Lake.

The original 177 acres of the Braun farm was purchased in 1860 by John Braun. Thirty acres across the road were added later. The present brick farm home was built in 1866, replacing an earlier log cabin.

Brick was drawn by horse and wagon from Adrian—then a two-day trip—by John's sons, Frederick and Charles. Shortly after the brick had all been gathered at the site, John died of pneumonia.

Fortunately the family went ahead with the building plans. Walnut trees growing on the farm were used in the house and also for furniture. The furniture was made by Sauer Lumber Co. in Ann Arbor.

The present occupant of the Ellis farm, Stephen Ellis Carr, was called out of town unexpectedly, so tour-goers saw just the grounds and exterior of the home. Tom Lacy, who with his wife, Harriet, arranged the tour, explained a little of the history of the farm.

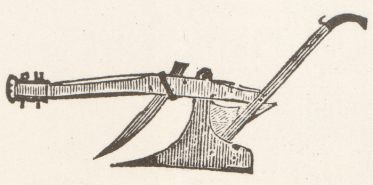
The Ellis family took up the land from the government and the original deed was signed by Andrew Jackson, descendants say. The family cleared the land, pulling out stumps with teams of oxen, and built a log cabin. Wolves could be heard howling outside at night.

Great-grandfather Ellis claimed he could have bought the land on which the Detroit City Hall later stood "for a song" at the same time but turned it down because he did not want a swamp hole.

Dr. Ellis, grandfather of Stephen Carr, is said to have shot the last wild turkey in the area.

The Wessel's first purchased 100 acres in 1864, later adding 50 more acres. The original home forms part of the present house, occupied by the Elmer Wessel family.

Visitors saw buttermaking equipment—a cream separator, churn, wooden bowl and butter press, some Indian arrow-heads,



awls and scrapers found on the farm, as well as antique furniture and household goods—sewing machine, coffee grinder, clock and kerosene lamps.

The original owner of the O'Connor Farm, James O'Connor, came from County Carlo in Ireland with his wife, Mary O'Neal O'Connor. The ocean crossing took six weeks. On March 12, 1834, he bought 80 acres for $125. The next year he added 40 more acres. He had chosen the land because of large areas of swamp grass available for cattle feed.

The family lived in a log cabin for a long time. Two other houses replaced it in turn before the present home was built in 1918.

In addition to farming, James O'Connor, taught the children in the area. He had been educated as he was to have become a priest. After his death, his wife is said to have slept with an axe under the bed because she feared the wolves. Two of their sons served in the Civil War.

The final stop was the Leland Farm which is familiar to many as the place on Whitmore Lake Rd. with the little house on the porch.

The little house is said to have been built by a man at the County Farm more than 100 years ago and has been on the porch ever since. Three were made and this is the last in existence. It has an upstairs and a downstairs but is not divided into rooms.

The original farm came down to the Lelands through the Osborn and Wheeler branches of the family. The farm, originally 110 acres, now is about 200 acres and is mainly a dairy farm.

Present farm operations on the working farms presented a vivid contrast to the farm life of a century or more ago which was being recalled to tour-goers.

They could see milking 1975 style, in a milking parlor, at the Leland farm, where milk is carried directly from the cow through pipes to electric cooling tanks in the milkhouse.

Large modern tractors and multi-bottom plows dwarfed the antique model the Braun's displayed and can do the work of several teams of horses that are pictured on the tour brochure. With them, there is little need of the iron dinner bell behind the Leland house which used to call the farm hands to meals. Besides the tractor-operator couldn't hear it anyway over the noise of his powerful machine.

Wheat used to be the main crop on the Braun and O'Connor farms 100 years ago when Washtenaw County was an important wheat growing area. Now corn is the dominant crop in the county. The Brauns also raise cucumber pickles on a large scale. Corn, wheat and oats are now raised on the O.Connor farm, but like many other small farms, they are planted by a neighboring farmer, either on shares, as there, or for rent.

While in the 1890's Brauns got only nine cents a dozen for eggs, some things were more like today—when a mortgage was obtained to plant a large orchard on the Leland farm many years ago, the interest rate was 10 percent. (Until about 20 years ago, Lelands raised and sold a lot of apples on the Ann Arbor and Detroit markets.)

LESS MUSIC IN FRONT

"The 1917 Ford car is less noisy than the old models, I see," said Peters.

"How is that?" queried Teters.

"Why, they've taken the brass band off the radiator."

From Ford Smiles: All The Best Current Jokes About A Rattling Good Car, gathered by Carleton B. Case, Shrewesbury Publishing Co., Chicago, 1917.

WCHS GAINS $325 IN GROOMES MEMORIAL PLANT SALE THANKS TO LYDIA MUNCY'S GREEN THUMB

Lydia Muncy has a very green thumb and thanks to her remarkable "thumb" the Washtenaw County Historical Society is $325 richer.

Mrs. Muncy shared a love of plants with the late Katherine Groomes, a life member who died last March and left a large collection of houseplants.

Mrs. Groomes's daughter, Marguerite Berg, of Ithaca, N.Y., hated to throw them out. Mrs. Muncy agreed to take them and conceived the idea of a plant sale to benefit WCHS.

The sale was held Sept. 2 and 3 under the portico of Ann Arbor Federal Savings & Loan on Liberty St. It was a blooming success Chairman Mary Steffek reports.

Mrs. Muncy propagated enough new plants from the Groomes household collection to total well over 300. It may be closer to 400 but she lost count as they were being moved to the sale! She plans to bring at least two dozen remaining plants to the next meeting.

She gave a special thanks to all who contributed flower pots. She would like to have thanked them individually but many were left without names.

The new—and old— plants were all sizes from small to large and in-between. Some from a large begonia were two feet high, other types trailed even longer. The collection also included African violets, azalea, poinsettia, spider plant, two varities of hoya and several succulents and cacti including Christmas Cactus.

Assisting Mary Steffek with the sale were Board member Rosemary Whelan and her daughter, Elizabeth, and Jean Lau and her daughter, Amy. (The Laus are not even members.) Tom Lacy, Sr., moved the plants and Hazel Proctor helped with the finances.

But by far the biggest thanks go from the Society to Mrs. Muncy who spent most of the summer slipping, potting and watering plants. It's not easy to get a plant sitter for 300-400 plants while you go on vacation.

THOMAS F. LACY ELECTED PRESIDENT OF SOCIETY CONSTITUTION, BY-LAWS REVISED AT ANNUAL MEETING

The Washtenaw County Historical Society elected Thomas F. Lacy president for the coming year and adopted a revised constitution and by-laws at its annual meeting June 12.

Dave Pollock was elected vice-president, Ethelyn Morton, secretary, and Hazel Proctor, treasurer. Elected to the Board of Directors were Irene Lawless, Mary Steffek, Rosemary Whelan and Frank Wilhelme.

Retiring President Hazel Proctor was presented a gavel in appreciation of her two years leadership.

The revised constitution officially inserts "County" into the name of the Society, establishes an executive vice-president, begins the fiscal year January 1 instead of July 1 and sets a quorum at ten percent of the members in good standing.

The Board, assisted by other members, spent more than a year go going over the documents to make sure they are adequate for the future when the Society hopes to establish a county museum.

'DETROIT OBSERVATORY' TO BE OCTOBER TOPIC

The October meeting of the Washtenaw County Historical Society will be at 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 19, at the old University Observatory on Observatory St.

Prof. Albert Hiltner, chairman of U-M Astronomy Department, will talk about the plans for restoration of the building which is widely known as the "Detroit Observatory".

JUDGE CAMPBELL SHOWS EARLY WASHTENAW SCENES

Circuit Judge Ross W. Campbell began his entertaining slide tour of old Washtenaw County scenes at the May meeting of the Washtenaw County Historical Society by reading the following poem:

"Michigania"

Come all ye Yankee farmers who'd
like to change your lot,
Who've spunk enough to travel be-
yond your native spot,
And leave behind the city where pa
and mammy stay,
And follow me and settle in Michi-
gania.

Upon the River Clinton, way through
the country back
There is the shire of Oakland, the
town of Pontiac,
Which springing up so sudden, scar-
ed wolves and bears away
Which used to roam about there, in
Michigania.....

Or if you'd rather go to a place
called Washtenau (sic),
You'll find upon the Huron such land
you never saw,
Where ships come to Ann Arbor,
Right through La Plaisonc Bay (sic)
And touch Ypsilanti in Michigania.....

He ran across it in a copy of the Saline Observer which got it from Harold Vaughan of the Saline Valley Farms. It was said to have been written by Sherman M. Pearsall at Scipio, N.Y., in 1838.

While the writer was a little ill-informed about Washtenaw, we can't fault his enthusiasm for our state. But as Judge Campbell pointed out the precise geography of Michigan was not known even to mapmakers then. An 1836 guidebook map shows a misshapen west coast of Michigan and nothing north of Bay City but a large area called Michilimackinac. Only the southern half of the lower peninsula was marked out into counties and towns.

This crew of relatives and neighbors helped butcher hogs at the Fred Fiegel Farm, 6050 Jackson Rd., on January 22, 1919. Shown (left to right) are Fiegel, Erwin Hack, George Steeb, Adolf Frey, Hilda and Minnie Fiegel and Ed Hack. Pictures courtesy of Mrs. Karl Geiger, the former Lydia Fiegel.

He also noted that tolls in 1836 were listed in pounds and shillings, rather than dollars and cents.

Judge Campbell who has had a long interest in local history comes by it quite naturally. Some of his ancesters settled in the county in 1826, 12 years before the New York poet tried to boost "Michigania" to prospective settlers.

He has had many old pictures he owned and borrowed made into slides. He showed a selection of them, starting with the first court house built in 1834 for $5,350. It was a little building on the N. Fourth Ave. side of the old Court House Square. Cords of firewood were piled nearby to warm it.

Other court house views included the beginning of construction on the second or "old" courthouse with the dome in 1877, the lawn crowded with people on the Fourth of July, Presidential Candidate William Jennings Bryan on the steps, and a group of high wheel bicyclists on the steps.

Other Ann Arbor scenes:

Main St. in 1870 with board sidewalks, hitching posts and gas lights.

Dr. Chase's Steam Printing House (northwest corner of N. Main and Miller Ave.) where he published his famous receipt book. Ann Arbor's own late U-M regent Junius Beal is in front with a high wheel bike.

State St. with students wearing "mortar boards".

Inside view in the old homeopathic hospital (North Hall).

Fire Department horses on the run in 1910.

Perhaps one of the most unusual pictures was of Alpha Washtenaw Bryan (the first white child born in the county in January 1824) sitting by the fireplace inside the log cabin which was once at the old fairgrounds (Burns Park).

Ypsi scenes included the Hawkins House (hotel) in 1860; Michigan Ave., which was wide enough for farmers to park their horses and buggies diagonally; the water tower, the Normal College (EMU), the C.L. Yost livery and feed barns with interurban tracks in front, presaging the decline of livery barns; and the interior of a "shaving parlor" with a stovepipe running across the room near the ceiling and the canary cage draped to protect the bird from the flash of the flash powder.

Roberts Tavern on Michigan

Ave. at Carpenter Rd. (northeast corner) was one of the old stage coach stops along the "Chicago Road" along which settlers came to find land. Such inns were spaced about 10 miles apart on the toll roads, he said.

The slide tour included street scenes and buildings in Dixboro, Saline, Milan, Manchester, Chelsea Dexter and Whitmore Lake.

There were farm scenes of butchering, threshing grain with horses in 1873, a horsedrawn cutter and a surrey with fringe on top.

The Lake House hotel at Whitmore Lake recalled the days when train loads of people came from all over southeastern Michigan and northern Ohio to Whitmore Lake. It once had three hotels.

A carved bar from a tavern in Dexter recalled the days when there were 13 taverns there. The Judge Dexter home, now U-M apartments, was named Gordon Hall by Judge Dexter from his mother's maiden name, Judge Campbell said.

After Webster township was named in 1834, someone wrote to Senator Daniel Webster to tell him about it. He sent a $100 to be used to found a church. The Webster Church is the oldest building in continuous use in Washtenaw County.

An 1848 picture of a log cabin built by Johan Spathelf in Freedom township reminds us of the austerity of pioneer life. Glass was a precious commodity and there was only one small window right next to the door. There it served a double purpose, the speaker noted. Besides letting in a little light, the occupants could see who was outside. Even at that they were better off than some cabin dwellers who had only oiled paper at the window to let in light and a blanket hung over the door to keep out the cold. If there was a door it was often hung on leather hinges because metal too was scarce.

Holding a string of "broadwurst" or pork sausage are (left to right) Fiegel, Steeb and Ed Hack. In the thrifty German tradition, the Fiegels cleaned their own casings from the intestines.

NEW WCHS PRESIDENT HAILS FROM SPOKANE; COLLECTS RARE DECOYS AS HOBBY

The new president of WCHS, Thomas F. Lacy, is a native of Spokane, Wash. with ancestral roots in Ann Arbor township.

He joined the society about six years ago, and served as membership chairman for four years. He was named vice-president after the temporary resignation of Dave Pollock early this year.

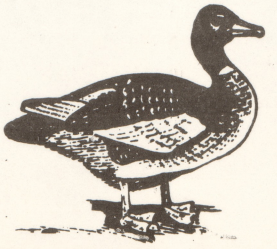
He first came to the area during World War II when he was stationed at Willow Run while serving in the Air Force. Here he met his wife, Harriet, and he has made his home here ever since. The Lacys have two children.

A graduate of the University of Idaho, he earned a degree in industrial administration from the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. He has had his own advertising agency in Ann Arbor since 1949. In 1959, he joined with W.Edward Drury in establishing Drury, Lacy, Inc. at 332 S. Ashley St.

He recently discovered that a branch of his family, the Chandlers, settled in the northwest corner of Ann Arbor township in 1827. They purchased 400 acres and lived there about 40 years.

He has been interested in antique collecting for many years, especially duck decoys. He has some rare originals in his collection, including a goose decoy. carved by Cree Indians in Hudson Bay Territory.

He also is a member of the Spokane Corral of Westerners, another historical group in his hometown.



HISTORIAN IDENTIFIES PORTRAITS OF JUDGES

The mystery of who were the unidentified judges in the several portraits found in the County Building has been mostly cleared up by Wystan Stevens, local historian.

He showed slides of the portraits at the May meeting and gave identifications he had then made. Since then he has concluded that one he thought was Hiram J. Beakes was indeed, by comparing it with a known picture of Beakes. One remains unidentified, though he thinks it is probably Bradley Granger.

Wystan discovered that it had been the idea of Judge Harriman in 1879 when the "old" Courthouse was new to decorate it with portraits of all his predecessors. Unfortunately, they were not identified.

TRACING GERMAN ANCESTORS GROUP'S OCTOBER TOPIC

The Genealogy Section of WCHS will meet at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 19, at the Manchester Township Library, 202 W. Main St., Manchester, to hear a panel discussion on "Tracing Immigrant Ancestors in Germany".

The group's September project is to "read a cemetery". That means to record everything on every monument in it. It was planned Sept. 14 at Botsford Cemetery on Earhart Rd. but in case of rain will be Sept. 28.

COUNTY CALENDAR

Chelsea—Meets 8 p.m. on the second Monday of the month at First Congregational Church. Next meeting Oct. 13.

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Dexter Historical Society—Slide program Thursday, Sept. 25, time and place to be announced.

Dexter Area House Tour—10 to 4 p.m. Friday, Oct. 10, co-sponsored by Friends of the Library and the Historical Society. Tickets for both tour and luncheon at St. Andrews United Church of Christ available at McLeod Drugs and the library. Luncheon tickets are limited and must be bought ahead.

All but one of the six homes is outside Dexter and planners hope nature will cooperate to make it a color tour too. An old home in Dexter that is being remodeled and a new home using antique furnishings are included.

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Milans Historical Society—Meets 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday of month at Milan Community House. Next meeting Oct. 15.

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Saline Area Historical Society—8 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 23, at Saline Library. Doris Wilson, who has a large collection of odds and ends of Saline History will bring some of her things and talk about them.

October meeting, 8 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 21, at the U—M's Bentley Historical Library on North Campus.

The Saline Historical Commission is preparing to conduct a survey of the city to locate buildings of historic interest. Training meetings for volunteer workers are being held.

COBBLESTONE FARM UPDATE SLATED FOR FIRST WCHS MEETING SEPTEMBER 25

Mary Schieve-Achenbaum, president of the Cobblestone Farm Association, will give an overall update on progress of the restoration project at the WCHS September meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 25.

Some of the artifacts dug up at the archeological "dig" there this summer will be shown. She will also show slides of the restoration work on the existing house on Packard Rd.

The dig was to determine the shape, size and orientation of various outbuildings in the farm yard, with a view of possible future restoration. A variety of artifacts were found including 5,000 nails, both round and square.

YPSILANTI SOCIETY GIVEN STATE AWARD FOR MUSEUM

The Ypsilanti Historical Society has been presented the 1975 "Award of Merit" of the Historical Society of Michigan for "its development and operation of a successful historical museum".

The presentation was made at the recent HSM annual meeting on Mackinac Island. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Thompson accepted it for the society.

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Washtenaw
Historical Society
Meeting
SEPTEMBER 25,1975
8:00 P.M.
LIBERTY HALL
ANN ARBOR FEDERAL SAVINGS
LIBERTY AT DIVISION

Miss Eileen Harrison
322 E. Cross St.
Ypsilanti, Mi. 48197